

Connecticut General Assembly
Appropriations Subcommittee on Elementary and Secondary Education
Public Hearing
March 3rd, 2015
Testimony of Carol Nelson, Manchester, Connecticut

Thank you Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Committee for the opportunity to testify today. As a member of your constituency, and as a supporter of magnet schools, I am writing to ask that you please use your influence to be sure that the magnet schools have the support and sustainable funding necessary to sustain high quality programming into the future. This is very important to my family as my 9th grade son Gary uses the very interactive, innovative programs as a student at Two Rivers High School every day.

One of our favorite programs at Two Rivers is Study Island. Gary dreads spelling and grammar, but in this online platform, with a few mouse clicks we can see how he is improving. I really like this because as he progresses, this ingenious program automatically becomes more challenging so he can continue to advance in this area. This builds not only his skills, but his confidence, independence and character as he continues to tackle something that he finds difficult.

I also love the fact that the teachers at Two Rivers have high expectations and are kind and firm. I love the fact that he is being empowered to be an engaged learner rather than feeling that he is helpless, a victim, or a mediocre student. He is also being held accountable for his own success and can work on this at home, even on snow days.

Two Rivers is, at no cost to us, holding a very helpful after school academy that helps Gary hone his test prep strategies so he can be prepared to take the SAT exams. We are optimistic that my son will be empowered by the confidence he is gaining in after school academy to earn some much needed scholarship money when he applies to college.

At his magnet school, Gary found out about a cool, hydraulic robot arm at a bio-engineering workshop that was held at the John Dempsey Hospital in Farmington. A handful of med students at this hospital partnered with the Connecticut Area Health Education Center (AHEC) to encourage at least 50 magnet school students to enter the thriving medical field. Another time, on a very cold, snowy morning, when there was a delay at school and attendance was low; his Physical Science Teacher permitted the few dedicated souls in class to tinker with a Tesla Coil. Gary was able to use electricity to make music.

Have you ever seen the "Main Stage" at the Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts? It is beautiful and has amazing acoustics. The new powerhouse instrumental/voice teacher took many students with varied levels of experience, and united them to create a very challenging, beautifully orchestrated winter concert in the center of Hartford. This talented music teacher is also using Gary to coach beginning students since he has been playing trumpet for 5 years. Thus he can grow as a musician, a mentor and a leader.

I hope you will consider providing the funding for:

- 1) Sustainable funding for magnet schools;
- 2) Elimination of parent pay for participation in integrated magnet preschool programs; and
- 3) Improved access to magnet schools through adequate transportation funding.

Thank you for giving me the time to tell you our story of another successful fit. I am happy to take your questions.